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AUTHOR Gehrke, Nathalie J.
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ABSTRACT

The results of a four-year study of teachers' perceptions of their role at work and in private life are presented. Information about the teachers came from interviews, observations, and written statements of concerns of ten teachers during the first, third, and fourth year of teaching. Changes in the private segments of their personal lives such as marriage and parenthood changed their perceptions of priorities and satisfactions. Personal-professional role conflicts arose from concurrent demands for their time and allegiance. In the fourth year behaviors emerged designed to cope with tedium of the teaching job and growing role conflicts. Some abbreviated case histories are used for illustration. (JD)

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A Grounded Theory Study of Teacher Role Personalization

Part Three

The Teacher's Role Conflicts

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Nathalie J. Gehrke
Arizona State University

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There are probably few among us who did not at one time harbor the belief that our own teacher lived at school, perhaps slept in a maintenance closet somewhere in the building, and took all meals in the school cafeteria. Children today are still amazed to find that their teachers have children, husbands, wives, homes, pets, and troubles of their own. It is difficult for them to comprehend that the teacher's life is not bound by the time and space of the school. But teachers, like all others, coordinate several roles, e.g. teacher, colleague, parent, spouse, citizen. In so doing they must cope with the conflicts arising from the demands of their multiple roles. Such conflicts have been acknowledged by others, (Prichard and Buxton, 1973) but rarely subjected to study.

The purpose of this paper is to report a longitudinal study that examined the relationships among the many roles played by teachers. It further reports the attempts to identify the teachers' role conflicts and coping strategies and thus, to generate a theory of teacher role personalization.

Perhaps educational researchers who have studied teachers have been functioning from the naive conception of teachers that we held as children. Both the limitation of focus and the choice of research methods for studying teachers found in reported teacher research illustrate this narrowness. Teachers have seldom been studied as whole persons who play multiple roles. Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) called for such holistic study when reporting their explorations of the sources of teacher stress.

Although the need for holistic study has been recognized, one finds that most research on teachers has isolated the teacher role and studied its components without relationship to other aspect of teachers' lives. A number of studies have been reported on role conflicts between the teacher's defined ideal role and actual role (Braga, 1972; Campbell, 1972; Getzels and Guba, 1955; Marshal, 1972; Tosi and Tosi, 1970; Walberg, 1968). All of the reports delineated cognitive disparity conflicts experienced by teachers in relation to the single role of teacher.

Recently, Popkewitz, Takachnick, and Zeichner (1978), Shroyer (1978), and McKay (1978) demonstrated efforts to study the perceptions and thought processes of teachers while in the teaching role. Likewise, Harmer (1979) reported on a study initiated to describe the values and attitudes toward teaching of teachers over fifty years of age with a minimum of twenty years teaching experience. The present author's study of the role personalization of beginning secondary teachers exhibited a similar limited focus on the engagement of individuals in the teacher role (Gehrke, 1976; 1978).

The preponderance of research on teachers has not only limited its scope to the isolated role, but has also used research methods that, by their very nature, result only in time-restricted, fragmented data. Nearly all of the studies reported above made use of single incident interviews, questionnaires, or short-term observation. Such methods are likely to describe interesting but tnin slices of reality without providing insight into the changes in roles over time, the interplay of events, and the interrelationships of roles. Each method used alone falls short of producing a portrait of the on-going complex life of an individual. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Weiss, 1968).

The study reported here sought to develop an accurate description of teacher role personalization from data gathered on teachers over an extended period of time. Further, it attempted to examine the teacher role as it conflicted with other roles played by the individuals. Role personalization is defined here as the way individuals adapt their roles to meet their own needs, while at the same time being socialized to the roles demanded by others (Getzels and Thelen, 1960). Role conflict is defined as the "inconsistent prescriptions held for a person by himself.... [and the] feelings of unease resulting from the existence or assumption of inconsistent prescriptions" (Biddle and Thomas, 1966, p. 12).

A brief description of the grounded theory generation method used in the role study appears next. It is followed by a summary of the early study hypothesis reported previously (Gehrke, 1976), and an explanation of thirteen more recent hypotheses generated about the nature of teacher role conflicts.

Method

A grounded theory research procedure, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used to gather and analyze data from ten beginning secondary teachers.

Information about the teachers came from interviews, observations, and written statements of concerns of the teachers during the first, third, and fourth year of teaching. The results were examined using a comparative analysis technique by which the information was coded and arranged into categories, and further subdivided into descriptive properties. During the first year, tentative hypotheses were developed on the basis of initial categorization. These hypotheses were then used

to direct first year end, third year, and fourth year interviews and observations for verification and elaboration of the theory.

Study Participants

The ten beginning teachers varied in age (22-35), sex, teaching area, background, and school environment. They were selected following the principles of theoretical sampling, that is, on the assumption that the differences among the participants would facilitate the discovery of theoretical categories, properties, and interrelationships (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). At the time the study began there were five women (one unmarried, four married) and five men (two unmarried, three married). Of the married teachers, three women and all the men had children. By the end of the fourth year of teaching the women were all married. Three had children and one was expecting the birth of her first child during the following year. Four of the men were married.

The teachers began work in three metropolitan high schools. Two of the high schools are new, open space facilities with young faculties and with students drawn from lower-middle and middle income families. There is a small minority population. The third school is an old school in an area serving lower and lower-middle income students with a large number of minority students. The school buildings are old and worn. Space is limited. Within the three schools the teachers teach science, English, home economics, business, foreign language, social studies, and drama.

Findings

Role Personalization

Three interrelated categories of teacher role personalization emerged from the data: needs, perceptions, and behaviors. Four specific

needs appeared to be most salient during the early role transition, and these basic needs, in turn, seemed to affect the teachers' perceptions of themselves and their problems. Finally, these perceptions influence the teachers' presentation of self and handling of problems.

The relations among the three categories of hypotheses may be schematized in a hierarchical model. The needs of the teachers form the first level, while the second level is composed of the teachers' perceptions. The third level includes the teacher role personalizing behaviors. Thus, the teachers' needs-dispositions permeate their perceptions of role, self, problems, and others, which, in turn, affect the behaviors they will consciously and unconsciously choose in enacting the role of teacher. All this proceeds within specific, yet changing environments of people, objects, and places. Each unique environment affects the role personalization of the teachers within it.

As data gathering proceeded over a four year period, the continuing role conflicts of teachers surfaced as a role personalization factor. These teacher role conflicts can be examined in three theoretical categories: sources of conflict, conflict arousing contexts, and conflict coping strategies.

Sources of Role Conflict

Most teachers experience role conflict from the day they start teaching, perhaps even earlier. Unmarried teachers appear to be the least likely to express any concern about conflicting role demands. One teacher, married between the third and fourth year of teaching, said this about her first years as a teacher:

> [As a beginning teacher] I didn't have anybody else to think about, but now my life is going to change....You see, my work was my life, and now I have something else. I've got to divide half and half.

The conflicts are most frequently expressed by married teachers with children, and particularly by women. During the fourth year of the study, all of the teachers but two males expressed some conflicts between personal and professional roles.

One might ask, why the role conflicts of individuals involved in teaching should be seen as different from those of other occupations. Does not everyone who has a career face these same conflicting personal-professional demands? No doubt the conflicts are similar. But historically, those engaged in teaching have been required by the public to give themselves selflessly to the demands of the role. To enable this full-time commitment teachers were often forced by their employers to remain single so there were no interferences. Teaching meant sacrifice.

It may well be that the high quality of socialization of women to the giving role of mother and wife is the reason women have so easily adapted to the role of teacher. When women then take on both the giving roles of wife-mother and teacher they are placed in a near impossible bind, because we as a society hold the same requirements of selflessness for teachers as for parents and a spouse, particularly female parents and spouse. If an individual has been well socialized to both the parent-spouse and teacher role, he or she has established impossible ideals against which performance in the roles is judged. One woman teacher explained her dilemma:

> I think a woman feels very much obligated to do certain things for her family, like fixing meals. Even if you have a husband who helps, it's always he helps you. You never help him fix supper. He helps you fix supper. Even if you have children who wash their clothes for you while you are gone, like mine are doing now. Even if they are understanding all the time....you begin to feel a little guilt....There are only so many hours in the day and I am one of those unfortunate people that has to have eight or nine hours of sleep a night....There are times when I would give anything to be able to sleep three or four hours

> and get up bright and early and get things done. I cannot do it, physically.... And I am tired of not being able to come up with any kind of solution for that, I think those conflicts are there.

Current trends in parenting roles and responsibilities may relieve women of some of the stress they now feel. But at the same time, men are experiencing more of the stress as they take on parenting and household responsibilities previously handled by women. As an example, one male teacher had this to say:

> ....Then last night I had to go to a meeting and after suppertime, my little boy who is two years old, I told him that I had to go to a meeting and I had to go away. I kissed him good-bye and he just hung his head. It made me feel so bad. You talk about guilt feelings--that's what it was.

Most married first-year teachers feel constant conflicting personal and professional demands. The new job requires hours of preparation and vast amounts of energy. The professional role sometimes takes over all the new teacher's thoughts and conversation. At the same time, the personal roles as parent and spouse continue to call for the emphasis established before the teaching job was undertaken. Family members may have been prepared in some measure for the effects of the job on the new teacher and on themselves. But, out of habit, perhaps, they make demands on the teacher that conflict with the demands of the new job.

Those sources of conflict take at least two forms: time, and allegiance. Whatever the nature of the personal and professional roles, the primary intangible demanded by each is time. Time spent demonstrates commitment and caring. Time withheld means neglect, disinterest. The resultant feeling described by the teachers when they perceive that they have not invested enough time in a given role is guilt. A male teacher admitted guilt about his limited time with family:

> The only guilt thing is that I don't spend that much time with my family....It's just a really fine line between not spending enough time with them [family] and not spending enough time here [school]. I have to keep evaluating myself and where I am.

Another teacher expressed a reversed guilt about her decision to stop sponsoring a school activity to regain time with her children.

> I'll tell you one thing I'm feeling guilty about right now, and that's that I've been sponsoring [the activity] the last year and a half and it's too time consuming. It's like two hours every night plus [events]. I told [the principal] I just can't do it anymore...I feel I've let these kids down by not doing it....I really feel bad about it. But you know I've got to weigh everything. My classrooms are suffering because of it. My family is suffering because of it. I feel guilty about it because of fourteen kids that I feel I'm letting down. Probably that's the biggest guilt that I can think of right now.

The expressions of guilt from these two teachers illustrate one of the major dilemmas educators face. Give time to one role, the other suffers, resulting in guilt. Give time to the other role, the first suffers, resulting in guilt. Guilt produced by such dilemmas is compounded then by the guilt teachers accumulate about other facets of their teaching work, for example, the lack of skills or talents to meet the needs of every student. How teachers learn to live with such heavy guilt is a question beyond the scope of this paper, but one of major concern to the profession (Jersild, 1955, Sarason, 1971).

The second source of conflict, while less prevalent, is equally stressful for the teachers. It is the concurrent demands for allegiance. This frequently requires the individual to separate the work role totally from the family role and to act as if the work role were of less importance to the person than the family. This role separation may mean not taking school work home to complete, or not talking about school problems at home, or not extending school relationships to spouse/family social

activities. Three teachers, all women, described situations in which their husbands had created barriers to integration of their jobs with their home lives. Two of the teachers' husbands expressed nearly total disinterest in the school situation and made it clear they wanted to hear nothing of it, though they tolerated the teachers' grading of papers and preparation work at home. The third teacher's comment was that she thought her husband felt "kind of jealous" of the fact that she spent a lot of time with school matters. She had stopped taking work home after the first year and, in a fourth year interview, reported that after much discussion with her husband she had decided:

> ....that what goes on in school should stay at school. I think that is something I have had to realize. All I was doing was buzzing about school. What happened between him and me seemed like it had no importance. The only thing I was concerned about was school....I finally realized what's more important....My husband and I had lots of discussions about it.

Although all the teachers experiencing this demand for demonstrations of spouse allegiance through separation of roles in the present study were women, it would not be fair to assume this is only a woman's problem. Conceivably men are asked to maintain the same role separation, but this will require further exploration. The problem created by role separation is an acute one, however. The teacher, already isolated on the job (Lortie, 1973), is further isolated from exchange of ideas about teaching by the refusal of family members to serve as listener-counselors. With whom will the teacher share then? For some teachers the answer is no one. They must deal with their problems, cope with their guilt, and handle their failures between the hours of eight and four, and never reveal their concerns or seek comfort from those most expected to provide it. The direct results are immeasurable, but reports of high teacher stress are not uncommon (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978).

Conflict Arousing Contexts

Situations and people change with time, so conflicts between roles increase and decrease. Several major changes in context appear to produce noticeable personal-professional conflicts for teachers in the present study. They fall into four categories: changes in personal role, addition of a new role, changes in the teaching role, and changes in personal needs.

Changes in personal role. Family member need changes appear to be one of the most frequent disrupters of previously stabilized personal-professional role balances. It is not uncommon for the teachers to describe situations in which their previously undemanding children reach an age when they require more time and attention. In the third year of teaching one woman said:

> You've got your own personal life. And I've got four teenagers who are driving me a little buggy right now anyhow. My daughter just came home from college. You know, she went away to college thinking she knew it all, and now she came home and she knows that she knows it all. [The second] is a Junior and she's just a very emotional person. And then [my son] is very emotional and then [my youngest] -- They are all very emotional. And with four of them at that age there's a lot of tension. Then to try to be involved with the [school] kids and worry about their personal lives. It just gets to be too much. And yet you feel that it would be good if they would feel more that you were there to lend a shoulder.

This woman's teenagers will eventually grow up and move from home, leaving her with fewer conflicting demands. But in the meantime the stress she feels is real, and as she points out, it does influence the way she relates to her students.

One male teacher discovered that when his wife took a job it affected his work as well as his home life.

> My wife started work. Our house is chaos. We are working on that now, trying to get that straightened out....I miss my wife. I miss going home and not having her there....I don't see enough of her to talk to her. I don't share things that I used to before. [When there is time] there's a lot I share with her that I wouldn't share with anyone else, you know, she listens. She gives me advice. She's been very, very helpful.

This teacher's wife had served as a counselor to him. When she had less time because she had taken on a full-time job to meet her needs, he lost his confidant. He, like many other teachers, found that if the spouse is unavailable to listen to teaching problems, the teacher stands alone.

A third teacher found that his time allocation to teaching had to be reduced when, on the death of his father, he assumed full responsibility for the care of his mother and operation of the family business.

Addition of a role. Individuals generally enter teaching at an age when roles are being added in both personal and professional life. Commonly, teachers are newly married, or about to be married. They may have young children or plan to have children soon. Taking on these new roles can have a significant effect on enactment of the teaching role. Time commitment and role integration may be immediately strained. One newly married teacher had this to say:

> I really felt a pull like I've never felt before in my life. I say, school's over, I'm leaving. And I would not bring work home. It's the first time in my life I've ever done that, where I'm so protective of my time....I was always here, always willing to stay if there was anything that I could do, and do, and do. And now inside I'm churning a little bit.

Another teacher, who at the end of the fourth year was expecting a child, planned to take six weeks off, then return to work. She was committed to returning and had made all arrangements. She was not sure,

however, that when the time came she would follow through with her plan.

> The thing that I'm concerned with is, do I want to be there [at home] when the baby is first born and go through the neat little things that it does. Or do I want to 'farm' the child out till it gets ready to go to school....That really concerns me. I don't know what I'm going to be missing, and how important <u>is</u> teaching?

Given the concerns expressed here, there is likely to be considerable conflict for this teacher if she returns to work as planned.

<u>Teaching role changes</u>. When the teaching role changes either through reassignment of the teacher or addition of responsibilities, the individuals may find conflicts arising. One teacher found that she had been able to cope with the demands of both her role as teacher and as mother until she took on one additional after-school responsibility as a teacher. The negative effect on her children, she decided, was too great.

> I dropped it [coaching an activity], I think because I was spending so much time away from my family. That was the worst year as far as my personal life was concerned because I was never home....It was really too much time. You can only spend so much time on your career before you are really damaging your own family.

<u>Personal need changes</u>. Finally, a change can occur in the individual teacher's needs. Such changes can lead to stress not just between the teacher role and the parent-spouse roles, but also between any and all of those roles and the needs the person has for time for self. For example, the teacher with four teenage children explained her feelings of guilt about not spending more time with her youngest daughter, yet she needed time for herself.

> I think she needs more support at this time.... but sometimes you just sort of resent it because you are tired and you really would like to just do something else....You have got to have time by yourself! If the kids suffer a little bit, well, then they did it.

Another teacher sought time to read and pursue interests that she had hoped teaching would fulfill, but did not. She soon found that a weekly return to the university for graduate courses in her special interest area met her own need for stimulating dialogue, even though it took precious time from school and family.

Conflict Coping Strategies

Teachers must each face the stress aroused by the changing role demands and cope with them in the best way they can. During the first year of teaching all teachers are provided with a rationalization for their stress that, though it does not alleviate the conflict, makes it appear to be a situation that can be handled. This rationalization can be called the new teacher myth. The myth holds that the stress felt by a beginning teacher is a temporary thing. Teachers are told by college professors, peers and administrators that if they get through the first year, everything will be immeasurably easier. Time will be more abundant because they will be prepared. They will be at ease and will be relaxed and enjoy teaching. The guilt new teachers feel about neglecting their personal roles is assuaged somewhat, because they think the overwhelming job demands will not last.

Perhaps belief in the new teacher myth is warranted for some. There does appear to be a decrease in the overall amount of stress described by the teachers after the first year. Some teachers are able to change their families expectations of them, e.g. the house will not be clean, meal preparation is everyone's responsibility, the teacher will not be home and/or available every night of the week. These changed expectations can help alleviate the teacher's perception of conflicting role demands.

Although expressions of overall stress decreased over time among the teachers in the present study, after the first year they talked more about the stress specific to the conflict between their roles. The "first-year myth" may get them through the first year, but for most of the teachers, the role conflicts do not go away. In fact, they may increase for those already experiencing some conflict and, as we have seen, they may appear for those who have not previously experienced conflict.

The coping strategies they use are likely to be part of a pattern developed in their early lives to deal with other problems and stresses. Generally speaking the teachers have three possibilities when coping with role conflicts. They can define one role as primary and the others as secondary. One teacher who reported no conflict said: "There's no difficulty because that's what I'm into [teaching]." Another teacher resolved the conflict she felt by deciding that family came first. "I finally decided what's more important....My feeling and my family won out."

The second alternative is to eliminate one of the conflicting roles. One teacher, unable to fulfill his needs for adult contact and variety in keeping with his personal life style, decided to leave teaching at the end of his fourth year. In his words, "Teaching is just something I don't want to do anymore..."

It appears that complete removal of conflict is unlikely for most teachers if teachers are truly interested in teaching as a career, yet feel unable to give it absolute primacy among roles. They must achieve a balance. A quick review of the earlier questions reveals the 'parity' terminology the teachers use in referring to their efforts, e.g. "divide half and half", ..."it's a fine line." The balancing, equalizing, dividing concept guides their efforts to meet the demands of the multiple roles.

To the beginning teacher, the symbols of a well-balanced teacher are the relatively unused briefcase and the seldom burdened exit from school at the end of the day.

> So the one thing that I am going to get rid of next year is my briefcase. I am not going to take it home.

or;

> I understand that M_____ does not take stuff home at night, I don't know how she does it, but if I could get myself to that point--.

It should not be unreasonable to ask for a work day that has some boundaries. Yet teaching, and some few other professions have not afforded their members a guilt-free quitting time. Couple this with the teachers' unending guilt about not reaching all the students and teachers are left to make peace with themselves with the support of few.

There do not appear to be verbalized guidelines for teachers in achieving the balance they seek between personal and professional roles. Instead, each develops an acceptable personal standard based, not on absolutes, but rather on a sliding scale within the context of school and home events.

Summary of Analysis and Hypotheses

The personal-professional role conflicts of teachers arise from concurrent demands for time and allegiance. Teachers are asked to decide whether they will commit time and loyalty to their jobs or to their families. Such demands are not constant, however. Changing personal role demands, teacher role demands, and individual needs, affect the conflict perceived by the teachers at any given time. In the face of role conflicts the teachers cope, first by accepting the new teacher myth of temporary stress, later they cope by accepting one role as primary, or by leaving

one role, or by flexibly balancing time and allegiance. The formal hypotheses generated from this analysis are the following:

1. The multiple roles played by teachers influence their enactment of the teacher role.
2. Married teachers experience greater personal-professional role conflict than unmarried teachers.
3. Female teachers experience greater personal-professional role conflicts than male teachers.
4. Allocation of time is a source of conflict between personal and professional roles.
5. Allegiance is a source of conflict between personal and professional roles.
6. Allegiance is demanded by significant others in the form of role separation.
7. The addition of new roles produces role conflict.
8. New demands caused by changes in the needs of significant others cause role conflicts.
9. Changes in the teaching role that create new demands for time and allegiance cause role conflicts.
10. Changes in individual needs of the role occupant cause role conflicts.
11. Teachers cope with conflict by a) designating one role as primary, b) abandoning one role or c) balancing time and allegiance to multiple roles.
12. Perceptions of balance of time and allegiance among roles is unique to the individual.
13. Teachers perceptions of role conflict and choice of strategies are influenced by early socialization to the personal and professional roles.

Implications

Hypotheses on the nature of the role conflicts experienced by teachers and on the strategies used to cope with the conflicts provide a segment of the larger theory of teacher role personalization. Without knowledge of the way teachers personalize, or adjust the role to meet their

own needs, a complete theory of teaching is unlikely. Without teaching theory the elusive concept of 'effective teaching' will continue to escape definition. And without that definition teaching-learning will continue to be enacted as it has since time immemorial, that is, by intuition.

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